

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 3093

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CZ, VT

SUBJECT: ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI'S VISIT TO PRAGUE

REF: A) PRAGUE 393; B) PRAGUE 427; C) ROME 1692

SUMMARY: SURPRISINGLY CORDIAL RECEPTION IN PRAGUE LEADS CASAROLI TO HOPE THAT AT LEAST SOME SMALL PROGRESS MAY BE POSSIBLE IN NEXT BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ANTICIPATED FOR MAY. IN BILATERAL ASPECTS OF TALKS, CASAROLI ATTEMPTED CONVINCE CZECHS TO MODIFY THEIR HOSTILITY TOWARD CHURCH. SPECIFICS LIKE CANDIDATES FOR VACANT DIOCESES AND FORMALIZING OF RELATIONS NOT RAISED. END SUMMARY.

1. DESCRIPTION OF HIS RECENT TRIP TO PRAGUE WHICH CASAROLI GAVE US MARCH 3 DIFFERS CONSIDERABLY FROM VERSION REPORTED REF B. ACCORDING TO CASAROLI, GENESIS OF TRIP TRACEABLE TO HIS MEETING WITH FONMIN CHNOUPEK AT JULY 1973 CSCE OPENING IN HELSINKI WHERE TWO PROTAGONISTS DISCUSSED IN VAGUEST TERMS POSSIBILITY OF CASAROLI MAKING OFFICIAL VISIT TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA. CASAROLI SAID HE HAS LONG BELIEVED THAT NO PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE IN GOC-VATICAN RELATIONS AS LONG AS CONTACTS LIMITED ONLY TO TECHNICAL WORKING
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LEVEL AS HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN CASE. HE EXPRESSED THIS VIEW TO

HURZA WHEN LATTER WAS HERE IN SEPTEMBER FOR UNPRODUCTIVE BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS. RESULT OF THIS LENGTHY GERMINATION WAS CHNOUPEK INVITATION TO CASAROLI. WHILE HE COULD NOT SPECIFY WHAT ALL REASONS WERE PROMPTING GOC TO EXTEND INVITATION, CASAROLI SAID THAT JUDGING BY PRESS COVERAGE CZECHS WERE HOPEFUL OF GETTING SOME MILEAGE OUT OF VISIT IN EUROPEAN SECURITY CONTECT. CASAROLI ADMITTED THAT HEAVY EMPHASIS OF GOC MEDIA ON INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS OF VISIT PROMPTED HIM TO MAKE MODEST COMPLAINT TO LUCAN WITH RESULT THAT FINAL PRESS COVERAGE GAVE MORE BALANCE BY INCLUDING REFERENCES TO CHURCH-STATE PROBLEMS.

2. CASAROLI SAYS HE WAS DEFINITELY SURPRISED WITH CORRECT AND EVEN CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE OF VISIT, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING VOLUME OF THE ANTI-VATICAN PROPAGANDA WHICH CZECHOSLOVAKS HAD PUBLISHED FOR SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL. BOTH IN PUBLIC AND IN PRIVATE, LUCAN, CHNOUPEK AND RUZEK EXPRESSED DEEP PRAISE FOR POPE PAUL AND VATICAN INITIATIVES ON BEHALF OF WORLD PEACE AND EUROPEAN RECONCILIATION. THIS SURPRISINGLY WARM RECEPTION SEEMS TO HAVE CONVINCED CASAROLI THAT BEHIND MONOLITHIC FACADE OF CZECH COMMUNISM THERE MAY BE SOME DIVISION OF OPINION ON HOW TO DEAL WITH CHURCH, AND HE IS HOPEFUL THAT IN NEXT STAGE VATICAN WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE SOME MINOR PROGRESS IN ITS RELATIONS WITH GOC WHICH HERETOFORE HAS NOT BEEN POSSIBLE WITH THE OBVIOUSLY INTRANSIGENT MR. HURZA. NEXT TECHNICAL MEETINGS WILL PROBABLY NOT BE HELD UNTIL MAY, WHEN ARCHBISHOP POGGI, VATICAN'S EASTERN EUROPEAN NEGOTIATOR, AND HURZA MEET.

3. WHAT CASAROLI MAINLY HOPED TO ACCOMPLISH ON VISIT WAS TO CREATE A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK IN WHICH FUTURE BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS COULD BE HELD. COMMUNIST IDEOLOGUES, HE NOTED, BELIEVE THAT RELIGION WILL WITHER AWAY ON ITS OWN WHEN THE EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL LEVEL OF THE PEOPLE HAS REACHED A SUFFICIENT LEVEL. IF THEY SINCERELY BELIEVE THIS, HE NOTED, THERE SHOULD BE NO NEED TO USE SUCH EXTREME AND VIOLENT METHODS TO DESTROY RELIGIOUS FEELINGS. GIVEN A SITUATION IN WHICH A FAIR STRUGGLE IS PERMITTED, THE CHURCH BELIEVES THAT IT CAN WIN THE BATTLE FOR MEN'S MINDS. AS HE ANTICIPATED, CASAROLI DID NOT ENGAGE IN ANY SPECIFIC DISCUSSION NOR DID HE PRESENT A LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR VACANT DIOCESES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA; THIS WAS DONE DURING TECHNICAL TALKS IN ROME. HE ALSO INSISTS THAT NO MENTION WAS MADE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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ANY AUDIENCE FOR FONMIN CHNOUPEK WHEN HE IS SCHEDULED TO VISIT ROME THIS SPRING. QUESTION OF FORMALIZED RELATIONS DID NOT ARISE.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NO CONCRETE RESULTS, CASAROLI IS OBVIOUSLY SOMEWHAT PLEASED WITH ATMOSPHERE OF HIS TALKS IN PRAGUE. FEELING THAT HE HAS MADE A MAJOR STEP FORWARD BY GETTING TO THE "SLIGHTLY MORE REASONABLE MEN AT THE TOP," HE LOOKS FORWARD TO THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME PROGRESS IN THE MEETING SCHE-

DULED FOR MAY. IN HIS "PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH" IN PRAGUE, CASAROLI SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO ISSUE CHALLENGE FOR A GENTLEMANLY BATTLE OF THE WITS BETWEEN ATHEISM AND CHRISTIANITY. ALTHOUGH ON THE SURFACE THIS APPEARS NAIVE, HE PROBABLY HOPING ONLY THAT THE GOC ANTI-RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN CAN BE SLIGHTLY MODERATED. QUITE INTERESTINGLY, YOGOSLAV EMBASSY TO THE HOLY SEE SOURCES HAVE RECENTLY TOLD US THAT BELGRADE IS SURPRISED AT THE EXCESSES OF ZEAL ON ATHEISM SHOWN BY THE CZECHS BOTH AT THE CSCE TALKS AND IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE HOLY SEE. THE YUGOSLAVS EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT THE CZECHS ARE NEEDLESSLY LOOSING A GOOD DEAL OF GOOD WILL OVER THEIR QUARREL WITH THE CHURCH, AND ARE ACTING "MORE SOVIET THAN THE SOVIETS". CASAROLI SEEMS TO BE HOPEFUL THAT THE CZECH LEADERSHIP MAY HAVE REALIZED THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE GAINED BY REDUCING THEIR ULTRA-HOSTILITY TO THE CHURCH.

5. THE CZECHS MAY BE OVERLY OPTIMISTIC IN TALKING OF A CHNOUPEK VISIT TO ROME THIS SPRING. FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCES HAVE INDICATED TO THE EMBASSY THAT THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL OPPOSITION TO THE IDEA IN ITALIAN POLITICAL CIRCLES. VOLPE

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